



Horses, Steers, Wildlife: All in a Day's Work for a Conservation Engineer in the North Woods

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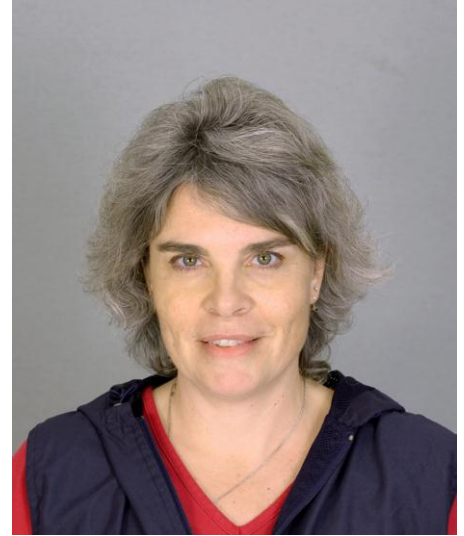
EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is one of a series of feature stories highlighting DATCP employees and the programs they work in.

MADISON – Imagine a woman standing on top of her pickup truck somewhere north of the middle of nowhere, trying to get phone reception so she can call for help with a flat tire after the standard-issue jack broke in her hand. One of those ads for cell phone service?

Nope. Just another day at work for Stacy Dehne.

Dehne is one of seven agricultural engineers with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection who work on land and water conservation. She's assigned to work in 14 northern Wisconsin counties, reduced from the original 18 she used to cover, due to geography and workload.

While she's assigned to those northern counties, engineering section leader Richard Castelnovo notes that she is the statewide expert who provides engineering assistance for difficult or advanced work on conservation practices. She consults with staff in other parts of the state, including her invaluable assistance in helping with stream bank projects in Adams County.



Conservation engineer Stacy Dehne was recently named Friend of Conservation.

"It's hard to find engineering jobs up north, so I feel very blessed and lucky to have found this job right where I needed it," she says.

The people she works with feel equally lucky to have her there. The Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association (WLWCA) recently recognized Dehne as a Friend of Conservation. The group comprises county land conservation committees and departments.

Her job is to help county land conservation staff in technical planning, design and construction on projects to prevent soil erosion and protect water quality. "I work on some farms, but because I'm in the north, I also have the opportunity to work on a lot of water resource issues like eroding stream banks and lakeshores, and wetland restorations," she says.

She makes it sound simple, but as Vilas County conservationist Carolyn Scholl said in presenting the WLWCA award, "Her patience is unfailing as she takes county staff and land owners through project explanations and designs, methods of field surveying, Natural Resource and Conservation Service standards, painstaking mathematical formulas, and compliance measures."

Scholl also pointed out, "She serves northern counties, (where) so often our situation and erosion concerns are not the typical ones that most agriculture engineers are faced with on a

daily basis. We don't fit in that box. This may mean designing new or rarely used practices But she is most professional in seeking the right solutions for the most unique of situations."

Those unique situations are all outdoors and scattered across a wide area, and that has provided Dehne with many memorable days at work: Surveying in 20-below-zero temperatures, slogging through a stream almost deep enough to breach her waders trying to get stream channel elevations after a rain storm, losing a boot to deeper-than-expected manure, rounding up horses after a colleague forgot to close a gate, avoiding a rambunctious steer while surveying a pasture, a week of leaving home at 3:30 a.m. to oversee construction on a huge manure storage installation.

That's all part of the charm – and the frustration, she says.

Her greatest pleasure in her work is "the diversity of people as well as projects that I get to work on. No day is ever the same. There's a challenge every day, so I'm not pigeonholed, doing one thing over and over."

But her greatest challenge is "all the travel and being all the places I want to be. I leave at ridiculous hours and get home at ridiculous hours."

Still, she somehow manages to get to all the places she needs to be, which Scholl also noted when she presented Dehne's award. "No county is ever deprived of her assistance when needed. She bends over backwards to accommodate counties' needs, even if it means sacrificing her own schedule to get the job done."

Besides awards, those crazy hours do yield some other benefits, Dehne says. Those sunrise and sunset drives are good for wildlife spotting and beautiful scenery.

Dehne earned her bachelor's degree in geological engineering, a combination of geology and civil engineering, from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She has worked for the Department of Natural Resources as a hydrogeologist/project manager, as a project engineer at an environmental consulting firm in the private sector, as the Price County zoning administrator, and even had a brief stint at the Department of Transportation, before joining DATCP more than 12 years ago.

A native of Menomonee Falls, she moved north to Park Falls in 1998 when she married her husband, Phil Richard. Hunting, camping, and fishing are all part of the former suburbanite's life now, along with snowshoeing and hiking. "Just to be outdoors – that's why I like where I live," she says. But her first love is cheering in the stands for all her kids' activities. Tess is 14 and Blake is 11.

Somehow she shoehorns all that into those other ridiculous hours she keeps.

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